

# **Between bodies and buildings: the place of comfort within therapeutic spaces**

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# Background to Maggie's

- Series of non-residential, non-clinical centres for those with cancer and their carers
  - Advice and information (e.g. welfare)
  - Psychological support (counselling)
  - Programmes of complimentary therapies and group activities
- Sited within grounds of regional oncology centres
- 16 established centres
- First centre opened in Edinburgh, November 1996
- Established by Maggie Keswick Jencks



# The hybrid building

- The typical Maggie's Centre is a kind of non-type: 'like a house which is not a home, a collective hospital which is not an institution, a church which is not religious, and an art gallery which is not a museum' (Jencks 2010, p.14)
- Spaces that are, often at the same time
  - Familiar and unfamiliar
  - Comforting and challenging



# Placing comfort

- Comfort as ‘a highly complex sensibility’ (Bissell, 2008, p.1697), characterised as
  - ‘an objective capacity’
  - ‘an aesthetic sensibility’
  - ‘a specific affective resonance’
- Think of a chair...

# An Objective Capacity

The feeling of things

“when I go into a GP clinic or urology clinic, I’m in a room in which there are books on shelves I’m never going to be able to read or understand, there are devices around here that I know not what they do, nor would I interpret, be able to interpret what results come from them, and so I feel like I’ve gone into somebody else’s house, that isn’t that comfortable with my being there”

(Tom, Centre Visitor)

# An aesthetic sensibility

The efficacy of the familiar and the unfamiliar

“the difference is the environment does feel comfortable and homely to people, so they do have a sense of rightness in being here, but I think because they’re not in their house, and they’re freed up from all of the constraints that that brings”

“in terms of [this city’s] styling and architecture... it’s not a common building, so it challenges people... what’s helpful about that challenge is by helping people to get used to that new space and something that is not as immediate for them, helps them to realise their own adaptability”

(Mandy, Cancer Support Specialist)

# A specific affective resonance

Comfort as achievement

“people do seem to get very comfortable in that building [another centre], very much quicker, they don't need a guide towards their comfort, whereas in this building they do, and maybe there's something in that, because that ... they're seeing us as a navigator... they're engaging with us and they're identifying who can help them with that”

(Nicky, Cancer Support Specialist)

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